

preservation **issues**

NEWS FOR THE PRESERVATION COMMUNITY

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

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Slave Memories Inspire Project

Every weekend this winter, while the snakes that normally inhabit the area are hibernating, an unusual archaeological survey is occurring at the site of the old Miller Plantation. The pre-Civil War hemp farm is located in southern Platte County on land owned by the Kansas City International Airport, which is cooperating in the survey effort.

The project has been funded by a grant of more than \$6,000 from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Historic

"George Washington, as was usual for Missouri slaves, was not permitted to learn to read, but was influenced by rumors that President Lincoln was about to free the slaves..."

Preservation Program to the Heart of America Council of the Boy Scouts of America. Five inner-city scouts will be conducting the survey under the direction of archaeologist James

Johnson, the principal investigator for the project.

Johnson, who also wrote the grant application for the project, has an intimate relationship with the site. His great-grandfather, George Washington, was a slave on the Miller Plantation from the 1840s - 60s. According to his family's oral tradition, Johnson said, "George Washington, as was usual for Missouri slaves, was not

(See *MEMORIES INSPIRE* Page 4)



Archaeologist James Johnson is supervising a survey of the pre-Civil War Miller Plantation in Platte County. Johnson's great-grandfather, George Washington, was once held in slavery at the site.

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The First Free Will Baptist Church of Pennytown — Born Again

Exactly three years ago, Preservation Issues (Vol. 4, No. 1) published the story of the Pennytown "project": the efforts of the descendants of the town's early residents to raise the capital to restore the Pennytown church. That inspiring story has come to a happy conclusion as reported below.

The First Free Will Baptist Church is the last remaining building still owned by Pennytowners in a once thriving freedmen's hamlet near Marshall, Saline County. The town itself, founded and nurtured by ex-slave Joe Penny in the late 19th century, no longer exists. The homes, schools and businesses of 40 families that once surrounded the church are gone,

replaced by an MFA test farm.

But Pennytown still lives. It lives in the memories of Pennytowners, and its story is passed down to younger genera-

triumph of its people over adversity and injustice in post-Civil War Missouri. It also serves as an important reminder of a part of Missouri's and America's his-

The small church... is the visible memory of the history of the town and the triumph of its people over adversity and injustice...

tions and honorary Pennytowners of all ages, races and creeds. The small church, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, is the visible memory of the history of the town and the

tory that should not be forgotten.

It was for these reasons that Pennytowners, under the leadership of the late Josephine Lawrence, began their lengthy effort to gain national recognition for the Pennytown church and raise enough money for the restoration project. Through bake sales, dinners, raffles, the sale of a Pennytown cookbook and "passing the hat," the group had raised \$18,000 by 1994. It was not enough for the restoration project, but it was enough to help match a Historic Preservation Fund grant, awarded in early 1995 by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Historic Preservation Program.

The project consisted of the construction of a new foundation, the reconstruction of the exterior walls using the building's original hollow masonry blocks, construction of a new

(See *FREE WILL* Page 6)

DNR PHOTOGRAPH BY KAREN GRACE



The adult children of the late Josephine Lawrence harmonize in the newly restored church sanctuary during the 1996 Pennytown Homecoming. Until her death in 1992, Lawrence led the fund raising effort to preserve the church.

The Preservation of Missouri's Black Heritage

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Historic Preservation Program (HPP) has long prioritized the identification, registration and protection of the state's African American cultural resources. A statewide survey, funded by the HPP and conducted by Lincoln University, in 1979 - 80 identified several hundred buildings associated with African American history and culture. Many of the identified properties were neglected or abandoned and in very poor condition. Since this initial survey, the HPP has awarded numerous Historic Preservation Fund grants to assist in the preservation of African American historic buildings and sites. But, although the work of the HPP has been important, it only supplemented the efforts that African Americans had already begun.

It didn't take an action by state government to initiate an interest in Missouri's rich black heritage. Shortly after World War II, black communities began taking an appreciative look at their histories. This new appreciation came at a time when improved economic conditions, a burgeoning sense of black pride and a general rise in cultural awareness presented both opportunity and motivation for the black community to study and preserve its own heritage.

In rural neighborhoods, small towns and inner-city communities in Missouri and across

the United States, blacks began to discover the cultural, educational, commercial and civic roles played by their parents and grandparents. This new awareness was often prompted by naturally-evolving events such as the 100th anniversary of a black church, the issuance of a major court decision or even a community tragedy involving black citizens. As religious congregations, for example, prepared to celebrate a special milestone, church records were explored more

...blacks began to discover the cultural, educational, commercial and civic roles played by their parents...

thoroughly. The original goals were to gather information and statistics that could be used at celebrations or in the writing of a church history. These searches often led to further exploration into cemeteries, courthouses, family letters, diaries and local newspaper files.

As the searches continued, more and more information was uncovered that offered glimpses of everyday life in the black communities. These discoveries gave insight into the efforts and contributions made by black citizens. Researchers quickly recognized

the tremendous value of what is often referred to as "pots and pans" history. The compilation of everyday struggles, small successes and slow advances began to earn them credit for their contributions to local, regional and even national life in America.

This search to uncover and preserve the contributions made by blacks was energized and made easier by the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act Amendments of 1992. From the black perspective, one of the most important parts of the act was that it relaxed some of the restrictions against the use of federal grants to assist in the preservation of religious properties listed in the National Register as long as the aid was secular and did not promote religion.

This relaxing of restrictions was important because the role of the black church cannot be understated. Often the only public building in which everyone could come together, the church house was the center of community life in many black neighborhoods and towns. It provided opportunities for blacks to develop leadership qualities, hone business skills, gain oratory experiences and find moral and spiritual comfort.

Missouri moved quickly — primarily through the efforts of the Historic Preservation Program — to help in preserving

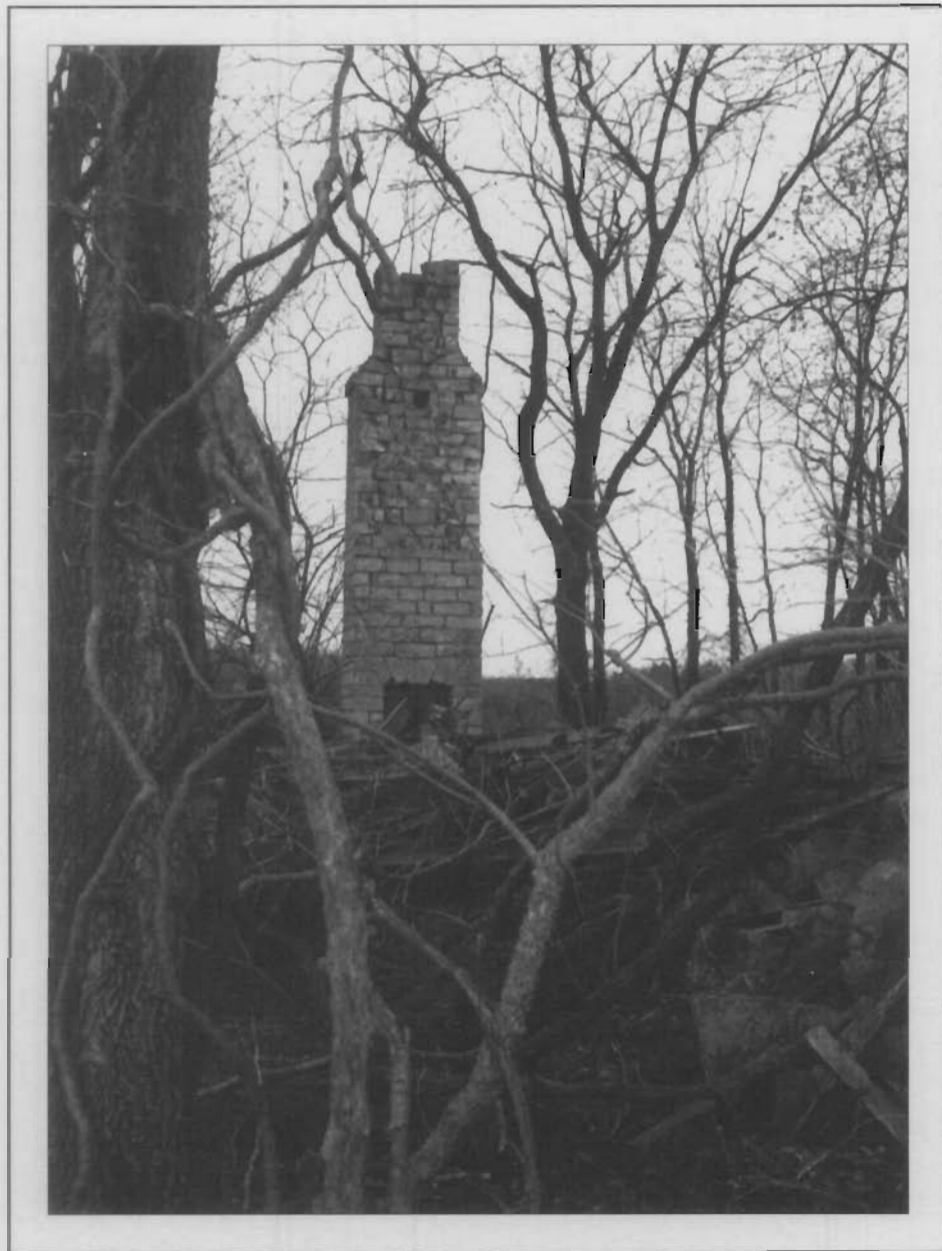
(See HERITAGE PRESERVED Page 7)

permitted to learn to read, but was influenced by rumors that President Lincoln was about to free the slaves and that escape to Kansas meant early emancipation. So, early in 1862, Washington escaped by way of Parkville, across the Missouri River and to the strongly abolitionist town of Quindaro, Kan. where he found sanctuary from slave bounty hunters.

"Eventually, great-grandfather made his way to Leavenworth where the controversial, abolitionist Senator James Lane was recruiting black troops from among the swelling numbers of fugitive slaves who had fled their masters in Missouri and Arkansas. George Washington enlisted in the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment in August, 1862."

Although he didn't realize it, Washington was about to make history. In early October of 1862, he was part of a detachment of 225 men from the 1st Kansas Colored who were ordered "to proceed to a point on the Osage, Bates County, Missouri, and there break up a gang of bushwackers." The 1st Kansans reached the area called Island Mound, near Butler, on the 27th, and on the 28th they were attacked by a large group of Confederate irregulars. The ensuing skirmish was the first time during the Civil War that black troops had been in combat. (See *Preservation Issues* Vol. 4, No. 1.)

Washington lived out the rest of his life in Kansas and, although he never learned to read and write, he told the stories of



The Ruins of the "big house," the centerpiece of the Miller Plantation.

his exploits as an escaped slave and of his adventures as a Union soldier to his family. Today, generations after his death in 1931, his story is still being told.

Johnson hopes that by studying the Miller Plantation site he will learn more about his own family history and also make a contribution to the historical record of the lives of slaves in an area of Missouri called "Little Dixie." The concept of Little Dixie as a place was developed

by geographer Robert M. Chrisler in the *Missouri Historical Review*, January 1948. Little Dixie has no definite geographic or political boundaries, but generally refers to a band two or three counties deep, north of the Missouri River and stretching across the state from the Illinois to the Kansas border. This area of Missouri was predominantly settled by "old stock" Americans from the southern states. These settlers



Johnson gives instructions on procedures for site measurement to Kansas City Boy Scouts Monte Camp (left) and Jalaal Green (right). Green is using the Miller Plantation Project to complete his Eagle Scout training.

brought the accoutrements of their southern culture with them to Missouri — including a strong loyalty to Democratic Party politics, building types and styles, food preferences and slavery — and created a life on the frontier

that was similar to the one they left behind.

The Miller Plantation is thought to be typical of Little Dixie. Johnson said, George Washington, born in "Old" Virginia in 1840, was given as a

wedding gift by his slave master, Daniel Jones, to his daughter, Margaret Jones, who with her husband Lewis Waller migrated to Platte County to farm hemp, corn and other cash crops. Lewis Waller died shortly after arriving in Missouri and in 1848 Margaret married Jesse Miller, who inherited the property after her death. In addition to the remains of the stately two-story "big house," there is evidence of slave quarters a few yards to the west, barns and other outbuildings. A family cemetery contains the marked graves of Jesse Miller, his wife Margaret and other family members. There are also a number of unmarked graves in the Miller cemetery. These "will be tested," said Johnson, but he believes "they are the graves of the Miller slaves. It was very emotional to look at those graves for the first time," he said. "I made a vow that day to preserve the memories of those buried there for posterity."

— Karen Grace

*Photos courtesy the
Platte County Citizen.*



Lewis O'Neil (standing), project director for the Heart of America Boy Scout Council in Kansas City, talks with survey team members Antwan Powell (center) and Jeremy Parker (right) as they warm themselves by a gas stove.

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roof and the installation of new windows and doors. Minimal interior work included drywall and a wood plank floor. Volunteers accomplished the interior and exterior painting.

In 1996, on the first Sunday in August, as they had been doing for 50 years, Pennytowners from throughout the United States came back to the church for the Pennytown homecoming. More than 200 people gathered on the lawn surrounding the building to greet old friends, make new ones, eat dinner and enjoy an inspirational program. But most of all,

they were there to celebrate the restoration of the Pennytown church; their "project" had come to a successful conclusion, and a new life was just beginning for the church building.

The restored church will play an important role in Saline County's heritage tourism initiative, hosting busloads of visitors who want to learn about Pennytown's history. It will also be the location of an educational field study program for the county's school children, especially those who are studying Missouri history.

Pennytowners, now under the

leadership of Lawrence's daughter Virginia Houston, have many plans for the future. Fundraising will continue for maintenance of the church building and for the restoration of the historic privy (also listed in the National Register). A fence, a sign and a brochure for visitors are also planned.

— Karen Grace

For more information about Pennytown or to arrange a tour, call Virginia Houston at (816) 886-8171 or 886-8418



Lawrence's daughter Virginia Houston stands in front of the recently completed church.

Annual Missouri Statewide Preservation Conference

Columbia, April 18-20, 1997

Preservation Begins at Home: Make a Difference

Sponsored by The Missouri Alliance for Historic Preservation and partially funded by a grant from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Historic Preservation Program and the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

This year's conference will have sessions and tours that address a broad range of topics of interest to preservationists at work in their own communities. The keynote speaker will be Nellie Longworth, the most accomplished lobbyist for preservation in the country and president of Preservation Action in Washington, D.C. She will also participate in sessions on preservation advocacy. In addition, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Claire Blackwell will report on the new statewide preservation plan. There will be special sessions addressing the needs of local landmarks commissions with John Williams from the National Association of Preservation Commissions in Seattle. A special component of the conference on Sunday afternoon will focus on the preservation of Missouri's African-American heritage. Claudia Polley of Indianapolis, who is a national leader in this area of preservation, will be the featured speaker, and the conference will conclude with a bus tour of the Social Institutions of Columbia's Black Community National Register Historic District.

Trade Fair

On Saturday, conference attendees will be offered the opportunity to view exhibits of preservation products offered by vendors from Missouri and surrounding states. Exhibits will be chosen for maximum visual appeal and information value and will represent a variety of products.

For more information, or to request a conference brochure, call Susan Hoefener at (573) 635-6877.

(HERITAGE PRESERVED, from Page 3)

the state's black history, especially the preservation of the black community's built environment. The HPP was aided by private groups, religious congregations, interested individuals and fraternal organizations in both the black and white communities. Historic preservation efforts were also bolstered by the popularity of collecting black memorabilia, the efforts to restore black neighborhoods, the widespread promotion of black histo-

ry, the revival of traditional black music such as ragtime and jazz and the overall interest in the pop culture of things such as the Negro Baseball League.

With support funneled into the state through the HPP, the number of black-related Missouri sites in the National Register of Historic Places began to grow. Since 1990, numerous new African American listings have been placed in the register. These include a community center, several churches, several schools, a

house, a large residential district and the 18th and Vine Historic District in Kansas City. In addition, several grants were given for black-related historical and archaeological studies and for restoration projects. (See page 2.)

One unique project involves an archaeological survey at the Kansas City International Airport. This survey centers, in part, around a black slave who lived on a plantation on what is now airport land. During the 1860s, the slave escaped to

Kansas but returned to Missouri as a Union soldier to fight in the Civil War. Ironically, the survey, funded by a grant from the HPP, is being done by an archaeologist who is a descendant of the slave in question. (See page 1.)

The never-ending challenge of historic preservation is filled with ironies and almost-daily revelations. And that challenge now has strong and growing roots in black communities as people there look backward in search of a better tomorrow.

— *Kay Hively*

Kay Hively is a free-lance writer and a former member of the Missouri Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

Landmark Listings

FOR SALE – Sanders House, Otterville

Circa 1849-1852 Greek Revival Style, 3-bay side passage, 2-story brick house on 102.4 acres, more or less. Located 15 minutes east of Sedalia, Mo., just off Highway 50. Features original entry with sidelights, original stairway, fireplace mantel, antique windows, some original flooring, rear addition modernized late 1960s. Brick portion of house is virtually intact, and awaits your rehabilitation. Acreage rented for cattle grazing, with pond and approximately 35 wooded acres. Older barn, frame smokehouse, chicken house, outhouse and garage under mature walnut trees.

Sales Price: \$100,000.00

Contact: Mary or Cloyd Sanders
(816) 886-5410



FOR SALE – Historic Arrow Rock Commercial Building

On the east end of the original business block on Main Street in Arrow Rock, a National Historic Landmark Village. Now owned, and restored by, Friends of Arrow Rock, Inc. Highly desirable location, and suitable for a business compatible with the ambiance of the village. Sq. Ft: 980, central heat and a/c, two half baths, full basement.

Call Kathy Borgman
(816) 837-3231



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